DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 086 614 SO 006 839

AUTHOR Dynneson, Thomas L.
TITLE Can Anthropology Revolutionize Public School Curriculum? A Position Paper on the Emerging Role of Anthropology in Education.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 12p.; Presented at the Iowa Academy of Science, spring 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Anthropology; *Core Curriculum; Curriculum; Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Planning; Educational Anthropology; Educational Innovation; Elementary School Curriculum; Integrated Curriculum; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Social Sciences; *Social Studies

ABSTRACT

Anthropology has the potential to influence and change current patterns of curriculum organization in the public schools. Assuming that secondary schools isolate and compartmentalize knowledge, that history dominates the social studies/social sciences to the detriment of the field, that anthropology incorporates specialists from many disciplines to solve specialized problems, then, anthropology appears as a natural "core" and opportunity for reorganization of the social studies curriculum. During the 60's many anthropologists became concerned about education and worked to develop curriculum materials. Anthropology answers the felt need for interdisciplinary education; moreover, the anthropologist's approach to studying cultural systems might be usefully applied to pedagogical problems. Anthropology, open to numerous levels of intellectual attack, is not a panecea for curriculum problems; it is a controversial discipline for which qualified teachers and adequate instructional materials are still lacking. Nevertheless, as a core for social studies curriculum it can facilitate activity learning, allow for instruction of social sciences methodology within its specific framework, and integrate the social sciences. (JH)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 086614

Can Anthropology Revolutionize Public School Curriculum?: A position paper on the emerging role of anthropology in education

Thomas L. Dynneson

The University of Texas of the Permian Basin

Odessa, Texas 79762

SP 006 839

INTRODUCTION

The central theme of this paper revolves around the potential of anthropology to influence and change current patterns of curriculum organization in the public schools. The paper is based on four assumptions: (1) Present school organization tends to direct secondary schools into departmentalization, hence isolating subject matter specialists and compartmentalizing knowledge. (2) History continues to dominate the social studies/social science field to the detriment of the social sciences. (3) Anthropology is a unique discipline in that it enables specialists from more than one discipline to work together on the solution of general as well as highly specialized problems. (4) Anthropology is not only a more natural "core" for the social science/social studies field, but it offers the public schools the opportunity to revitalize and improve the secondary social studies curriculum.

Anthropologists have become more concerned about our educational system in recent years. This concern is demonstrated by the recent organization of the Council on Anthropology and Education which is a branch of the American Anthropological Association. Many anthropologists have been interested in education as an important segment of our cultural system, while others have become involved in preparing materials for the teaching of anthropology in our public schools.

George Spindler has long been concerned with our education system; Paul Bohannan of Northwestern University has

written articles on the teaching of anthropology and is presently involved in preparing an experimental course in anthropology for the ninth grade. Malcolm Collier of the University of Chicago and Robert Hanvey at the University of Indiana have both done extensive work on anthropology curriculum projects. Winfield Bailey helped direct the anthropology project located at the University of Georgia. Frederick Gruber wrote recently that "The discipline of anthropology is most helpful to (education) in this respect because it deals with the biological and mental manifestations of human life as they appear in different races and in different societies."[1]

---

[1]Frederick C. Gruber, (ed.), Anthropology and Education, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961) p. 11.

Thus, it is believed by some that education systems offer the anthropologist an important aspect of culture for study while the anthropologist offers educators new approaches to exploring the system. The result of the anthropologist's work should provide the educator with a better understanding of, and some possible solutions for, existing problems. The problem of immediate concern is how anthropology may change and hopefully improve existing patterns of curriculum organization.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Before World War II, anthropology was almost exclusively taught at the college level. During World War II, radio,

movie newsreels, and various forms of printed materials focused western world attention on peoples living in exotic and non-western parts of the world. Interest in anthropology grew during the 1940's and into the 1950's until a few isolated courses in the discipline emerged in some public high schools.

It was, however, during the 1960's that school districts began to prepare courses in anthropology. Also during the 1960's, the social studies "reform" movement included materials in anthropology which meant that it could be taught in the public schools on a national scale for the first time. During this period of time, federal and private institution money became available to scholars for the development of curriculum materials in all the disciplines of the social sciences. Almost all of the curriculum materials produced for the teaching of anthropology were prepared in conjunction with universities. The materials were written, for the most part, by teams made up of anthropologists and public school personnel. The American Anthropological Association gave support to the Anthropology Curriculum Study Project which was originally directed by Malcolm Collier at the University of Chicago. Members of the American Anthropological Association were kept abreast of the project which went on over a ten year period of time. There were other projects funded for the purpose of producing anthropology materials but not specifically under the auspices of the AAA. The Anthropology Curriculum Project, located at the University of Georgia, is of particular concern because its entire

goal was the production of anthropology materials for elementary school use.

In spite of the American Anthropological Association's support for the production of anthropology materials, not all anthropologists have been supportive of its inclusion in the public school curriculum. Douglas Oliver the noted Harvard anthropologist stated, "I would rather see anthropology not taught as a subject until the last two years of college, the study of anthropology should be designed mainly for people who are going to become practitioners in the discipline."[2]

[2] Wm. T. Lowe, Structure and the Social Studies (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969) p. 191.

Spindler, however, disagreed with Oliver on this point when he wrote, "The implication is clear that anthropology should be used as a contribution to general education more widely than it is. It should not be taught as it is to graduate students trained to become professional anthropologists. Nor should it be taught as an introduction to a scholarly discipline, as it often is at the college level, even in the beginning course. It should be taught as an introduction to a perspective on human life as a way of thinking that we might call 'humanistic objectivity'."[3]

[3] George Spindler, Education and Culture: Anthropological Approaches (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963) p. 55.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL STUDIES

Chilcott writes of the advantage of including anthropology in the public school curriculum especially for the social

studies/social science field. He states that anthropology would become the organizing discipline of the social studies and could serve as the framework for all types of related topics. Anthropology should reduce the role of history as the dominant center of the social studies curriculum. Anthropology as the "core" of the social studies would facilitate the crossing of subject matter barriers as they exist today.[4]

---

[4]J. H. Chilcott, "Proposal for the Unification of Secondary School Courses Through Anthropology," Clearing House, 36:387-93, March, 1962.

The scope of anthropology is broader and its boundaries less restricted than any of the other social sciences. One of the most often stated definitions of anthropology used phraseology such as "the study of man" or "the study of man and his works." Some others have gone so far as to state that the scope of anthropology is only restricted by what anthropologists do and anthropologists do what they please.[5]

---

[5]Sol Tax, "What Do Anthropologists Do?" Social Education, 32:132-4, February, 1968.

Anthropology as the "core" of the social studies offers the public schools the following advantages:

1) The content of the curriculum can be ordered so that the sequence and continuity of the social studies can be reorganized. For instance, the lower grades could begin to study a variety of cultures. As the student progresses through the grade levels, specific aspects would be stressed. Culture and

the influence of economic systems, culture and the influence of political systems, culture and geographic influence (climate, natural resources, topography, etc.). In the secondary grades, more complicated and sophisticated concepts could be introduced such as the analysis of cultural systems, the rise and fall of civilizations, anthropological theory and philosophical considerations. The variety seems extensive and the opportunities for creative reorganization outstanding.

2) Anthropology would not diminish the standing of other social sciences but would integrate their knowledge and specific techniques into a more comprehensive and meaningful pattern complementing rather than competing with these disciplines. History would be considered as a branch of the humanities and would be taught in conjunction with literature as part of the written heritage of the culture being studied.

3) The methodology of anthropology or techniques of inquiry are not so different from the methodology of the other social sciences, thus, a general course in methodology could be taught. The more specialized aspects of each discipline's methodology could be handled at appropriate times.

4) The field work experience and laboratory work which are essential for the anthropologist would make the social sciences more "activity" centered than they have been prior to this time. Since there is a general trend toward moving some school activities back into the community, anthropology would offer many opportunities for students to move their classroom to museums, sites of excavations, or to community centers; plus, the summer travel and field opportuni-

ties are unlimited.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE GENERAL CURRICULUM

The opportunities to reorganize the general curriculum using anthropology as the core discipline should be a distinct possibility on at least an experimental basis. Some writers contend that there is a great need for general curriculum reorganization in the public schools. One of the most often heard criticisms of the curriculum is that it fails in a comprehensive way to solve one or more of the problems of scope, sequence, continuity, and integration.[6]

---

[6] Hilda Taba, Curriculum Development Theory and Practice, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1962), p. 382.

Students graduating from our public schools are often unable to integrate and relate disciplinary knowledge in any way. They see everything as discrete blocks in accordance with the way they were taught. By the time a student reaches the secondary level, the results of departmentalization have led to compartmentalization of knowledge with few courses providing interconnecting bridge work between disciplines. Teachers prepared for the secondary level are discipline oriented and often highly specialized as to their area of concentration. The result is often academic isolation, and the result of this isolation leaves the student with the problem of integrating specialized knowledge without the benefit of experienced help. The schools should be able to provide some degree of integration, but those who teach

are frequently unable to break out of the confinements which have become established over the years. What is needed is a new curriculum organization that will bring specialists from several disciplines into teams and break down the existing pattern of departmentalization. A team of five or more teachers from several disciplines would be freer to work together on related problems using a multi-disciplinary approach.

Anthropology contains characteristics which may provide the schools with an alternative curriculum structure. By its very nature, anthropology is a broad based discipline. It relates to the natural sciences, the humanities, language, arts, and fine arts. The four fields which make up the discipline reflect this relationship. Cultural anthropology incorporates all of the social sciences as well as the fine arts where they are the products of primitive man. Physical anthropology includes the application of natural science to problems found in social science, and makes use of biology, physics, genetics, chemistry where questions of race and population variances are studied. Archaeology combines the knowledge and techniques of natural and social science in order to piece together the remnants of past civilizations. The archaeologist is concerned with crafts, fine art, pottery, ceramics, and ancient forms of mathematics, calendrics, architecture, writing, and religion as they relate to man's past. Finally, linguistics and language arts are closely related as the linguist studies the structure, use, and relationship of language. It is from the work of the linguist that the

anthropologist may gain clues to the movements and relationships between men and their unrecorded activities. By its very nature, anthropology is an integrated discipline made up of specialists who are trained in a variety of ways but who work more or less together on the solution of common problems. Thus, anthropology has the potential to serve as a pattern for the reorganization of secondary schools.

The anthropologist's approach to studying cultural systems may also aid the educator in the solution of existing pedagogical problems. There seems to be a general need for a broader understanding of what intelligence is, how various cultural attitudes affect learning, how an institution such as a school can reorder its priorities to meet the cultural needs of its people, how teachers can be prepared to cope with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and how institutions of higher education can be revitalized to make better use of specialized knowledge.

CONCLUSION

It would be misleading to regard anthropology as a panacea for all of the problems facing the public school curriculum or the social studies. It is doubtful that the public schools are prepared to charge headlong into anthropology without carefully weighing any negative consequences which may result from including it in their curricula.

There is a general lack of materials for the teaching of anthropology. In spite of the project work and the work of

some textbook publishers, the materials available for the teaching of anthropology are considered inadequate as compared to materials available in the traditional or established fields. Geography is a strong competitor to anthropology since they have similar areas of concern. There is a lack of qualified teachers available to teach anthropology in the public schools. Teachers presently teaching in the schools have little or no preparation in anthropology. Furthermore, some communities may resist the inclusion of anthropology in their school curricula because of the previous stormy, emotional, and controversial debates which involved the theories about race and evolution. Recently California has gone through a period of turmoil perhaps because this state has led the nation in the introduction of anthropology courses into the public school curriculum. Community groups have resisted the introduction of anthropology courses for a variety of quasi-political reasons. History still dominates the social studies curriculum and it has resisted all newcomers who would challenge its place of prominence. It is doubtful that anthropology will challenge history's place in the curriculum in the foreseeable future. Though many professional anthropologists have shown some enthusiasm for the introduction of their discipline into the public schools, there are those who would resist such a move because they fear that anthropology could become too much of an emotional issue or might be taught by such poorly prepared teachers that the discipline would suffer setbacks.

Even with all of these problems, anthropology has the

potential for changing and strengthening the social studies and may offer a pattern for bringing revolutionary changes in the general curriculum. Public education today is less static in many ways than higher education. More alternatives are being offered to students and parents. Physical plants and teaching patterns have changed in the past decade. The curriculum patterns have changed as new courses have been added. In spite of all of these changes, history still dominates the social sciences in an unnatural alliance; and departmentalization and compartmentalization of knowledge creates an artificial environment which hinders students' perspectives of the interrelatedness of man's accumulated knowledge.